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RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 3880
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 004042

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: THAI RAK THAI PLANS TO RISE FROM THE ASHES

REF: A. BANGKOK 4003 (VIOLENT DEMONSTRATION)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3978 (SONTHI'S CANDIDACY)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2994 (TRT DISSOLVED)

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Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor David R. Greenberg, reason 1.
4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Former Thai Rak Thai (TRT) figures will soon try to register a new political party to compete in this year's elections. The new Party Leader has not yet emerged but may be a close associate of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin, although a contact told us Thaksin will not publicly endorse the party. This contact predicted that the reincarnated version of TRT could win a plurality in the next election, but we believe this assessment may be overly optimistic and is certainly premature. The officials who ran TRT from the time of the 2006 coup d'etat until the party's dissolution appear resentful of their colleagues who retreated from the political scene after the coup only to reemerge recently. Former TRT official Newin Chidchob was alleged to be responsible for the violent demonstration outside the Privy Council President's Bangkok home on July 22. End Summary.

WORKING GROUP FORMS, LEADERSHIP TBD

[1](#)2. (SBU) On July 18, the legislature lifted the legal restriction (in place since the coup) that prohibited the registration of new political parties. The final version of the law did not include proposed provisions that would have hampered the reemergence of Thai Rak Thai (e.g., barring use of the name or initials of a dissolved party). However, the legislature also intends to pass a new political party law, which may include such provisions -- or, the Election Commission may be entitled to exercise discretion upon receipt of an application for registration.

[1](#)3. (C) Politicians formerly associated with Thai Rak Thai have formed a committee which is working to establish a new political party as the reincarnated version of TRT. This

75-person committee consists primarily of former TRT legislators, few of whom can claim top-tier status in the political class. While the list of committee members includes people from all regions of Thailand, the majority appear to come from the Northeast, the country's most populous region, and a stronghold of support for TRT.

14. (C) The committee President is Sompong Amornwiwat, a veteran politician who most recently served as Trade Representative in Thaksin's administration. Sompong appears to be one of the leading candidates to become Party Leader of the TRT successor party. (Others include former Communications Minister Surapong Suebwonglee, and Somchai Wongsawat, a former Justice Ministry Permanent Secretary who is also Thaksin's brother-in-law.) The party will have to decide on its leadership before seeking registration. The senior figures from the TRT executive board -- who now are covered by a five-year ban from politics (ref C) -- appear relegated to an advisory board.

OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK FOR ELECTIONS

15. (C) Former TRT Deputy Leader Pongphon Adireksan -- one of those who is now advising the committee -- met with us on July 24 and offered an optimistic projection for the next elections. Citing his experience as a long-time politician and two-time TRT campaign manager, Pongphon estimated that the Democrat Party, Chart Thai, and Mahachon would not make significant gains over their 2005 showing, winning no more than 150 seats in the new 480-seat House. He predicted that major TRT splinter groups Matchima (led by Somsak Thepsutin) and Samanchan (led principally by Suwat Liptapanlop and Pinij Jarusombat) would win no more than 50 seats each. The Ruam Chai Thai group associated with former Deputy Prime Minister

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Somkid Jatusripitak might win 10 seats. Any further gains by one of these three TRT splinter groups would likely come at the expense of the others, rather than the TRT successor party. Like other contacts of ours, Pongphon saw little hope for the "Love the Nation" (Rak Chart) party, which might be established by businessman Kajit Habanananda and could serve as a vehicle for General Sonthi Boonyaratglin (ref B). Pongphon predicted Rak Chart would fail to win even a single seat in the parliament.

16. (C) Having estimated that these parties could win 260 House seats, Pongphon assessed that the remaining 220 would fall almost by default to the TRT successor party. The reincarnated TRT would appeal to the public by advocating the populist policies of the Thaksin era. He predicted a significant "sympathy vote" for TRT, although he also said the party would in some ways distance itself symbolically from Thaksin. Thaksin would not publicly endorse the party, he predicted. Pongphon did not indicate that Thaksin would provide funding (as is commonly assumed), but he asserted that the new TRT would be no worse off financially than its rivals.

RIFT AMONG FORMER TRT EXECUTIVES

17. (C) Pongphon refrained from estimating how many former TRT executives were actively supporting the resurrection of their party. But he indicated that the small group of figures (including himself) who steered TRT from the time of the coup until the party's dissolution resented their former colleagues who had lain low after September 19 but now sought to reassert themselves. He specifically expressed a degree of scorn for TRT's former top-ranking Deputy Leader, Sudarat Keyuraphan, and Yaowapa Wongsawat (Thaksin's sister). When we asked whether Sudarat had joined former TRT Acting Leader Chaturon Chaiseng in the gestating party's advisory board, Pongphon seemed unwilling to specify her role (or absence thereof) but simply stated, "Well, I won't be looking for any

advice from her."

ATTRIBUTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNREST

18. (C) Pongphon also asserted with certainty that former TRT Deputy Leader Newin Chidchob had organized the July 22 demonstration at the Bangkok home of Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda, which turned violent (ref A). Pongphon said Newin's political talents lay primarily in organizing such street actions, and, regrettably, Thaksin liked to see such things take place. (Other contacts from TRT have previously confirmed Newin's role in organizing anti-coup demonstrations.) Pongphon said the new TRT party would exclude the less reputable associates of Thaksin -- not only Newin, but also Prommin Lertsuridej, former Secretary General to the Prime Minister.

COMMENT

19. (C) Many voters liked the populist policies associated with TRT, and they should have the option of voting for a party that occupies the same political space. But Pongphon's expectations for an easy plurality in the next parliament may be overly optimistic. His new party's formal leaders remains undetermined but are certain to lack the stature of their predecessors; the party's informal leadership appears afflicted by factionalism, and we have not yet seen that it will have at its disposal the same sort of financing that helped to fuel TRT's campaigns. Nevertheless, it seems certain that a party wearing the TRT mantle would be an important factor in the next election, and we will watch carefully how the authorities react to this party's emergence.

ENTWISTLE